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**Citation for published version:**

Mills, M, Riddell, S & Hjörne, E 2015, 'After exclusion what?', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, vol. 19, no. 6, pp. 561-567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.961674>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1080/13603116.2014.961674](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.961674)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

International Journal of Inclusive Education

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

©Mills, M., Riddell, S., & Hjörne, E. (2015). After exclusion what?. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(6), 561-567. 10.1080/13603116.2014.961674

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## **After exclusion what?**

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### **Overview**

This special issue grew out of a symposium held at the University of Gothenburg in March 2013 and builds on a collaboration between the Schools of Education at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Gothenburg. The symposium on 'Inclusion and Exclusion within School' launched the Platform for Research on Inclusive Education and School development (PRIS) at the University of Gothenburg. Attendance at the symposium was facilitated by three research grants from the following bodies: the Australian Research Council, the Leverhulme Foundation and the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences. Full details are provided at the end of this introduction. The three editors of this issue all presented at this symposium on work they had been doing in relation to young people excluded from school. Many of the papers delivered at that symposium raised concerns about the ways in which current education policies in many nations work against the interests of the most marginalised young people in schools, including many Scandinavian nations which have a historical commitment to the principles of equity in education delivery. Across many jurisdictions, education systems have been influenced by marketization and managerialism, described by Pasi Sahlberg (2011) as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM). It is clear that within a neoliberal climate, where schools market themselves on the grounds of standardised test scores and orderly environments, there is a number of young people whose presence works against the image that schools are attempting to fabricate of themselves (Ball, 2003). Many of these young people are either encouraged to find a school 'more suited' to their needs or face sanctions that prevent them returning to the school. Those faced with the former option are regularly transitioned to the latter. Some young people are also excluded by their life circumstances which make attending school impossible. The impact of these forms of exclusion, often experienced by highly marginalised young people, can have a damaging effect on their life opportunities and work to reinforce already existing injustices (cf. Goffman's classical work on stigma 1990).

In this special issue, we take a broad view of the term exclusion. It may refer to the formal processes of school exclusion, whereby students are disqualified from attending one or more schools. In addition, it may refer to the more informal, and sometimes more insidious processes that see certain students denied the benefits of a particular classroom or school because of perceived attributes (e.g. ADHD, academic ability). However, we also wanted to acknowledge that some young people are excluded before even arriving at school and that exclusion is not just something that happens within schools, but is also a process that shapes the everyday experiences of many young people, even at the pre-school stage, for example in play interaction among peers (see Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009).

In bringing the papers together for the special issue we took as our starting point Roger Slee's (2011) concern with those who have been 'dispersed from education into the shadow-lands of schooling'. We thus looked for papers that examined aspects of school culture which lead some young people to disengage from education and explored what happens in the shadow-lands of where these young people find themselves after they have been excluded from school, either formally or informally. As well as focusing on young people who are no longer able to engage with formal education, the special issue was also interested in investigating some of the educational options taken up post-exclusion. Some of these options are not necessarily voluntary, for example, they might be imposed via a juvenile justice court order, or be a requirement of an education system. Thus papers explore the experiences of young people in pupil referral units and detention centre schools, as well as flexible learning centres, alternative schools, colleges, workplaces, and those not in any form of

education or work. There is a growing trend to outsource this type of provision to the private or not—for-profit sector, raising questions about the ‘creeping privatisation’ of state education. These and other issues were addressed at the Gothenburg symposium and contributors there were invited to submit papers to be considered for this issue. We also invited a number of others working in this space to contribute to the special issue to complement areas not covered.

Zygmunt Bauman (2004), concerned about the way in which particular groups of people are ‘disposed of’ in contemporary society, describes a scene where the produce from a factory leaves during the day, whilst the waste is secretly disposed of in the night and transported from the site in unmarked lorries. The analogy can be applied to education where those young people who have great successes appear with great fanfare in school newsletters, advertising materials, web sites and the like, whilst those not wanted by the school often disappear quietly and into a variety of pathways that can limit their opportunities (see for example, Mills, Renshaw and Zipin, 2013). The analogy is also appropriate in multiple locations, as the papers demonstrate here, such as England, Sweden, Wales, Australia and Canada. One key group of young people not wanted by many mainstream schools consists of those with a criminal record or who are in trouble with the youth justice system. Young people in the youth justice system thus face enormous educational disadvantage. Many such young people already experience a difficult relationship with the education system as demonstrated through their schooling histories, and attempts to re-engage with school after arrests or custodial sentences which often compound their situation. The social justice implications of such exclusion are important, given that it is primarily the poor and students from marginalised ethnic backgrounds who experience these difficulties. This is to some extent recognised by governments which have developed a range of initiatives to ensure that all pupils have access to education (e.g. within the *Getting it Right for Every Child* initiative in Scotland, which has a major focus on pupils’ wellbeing and the new Education Act in Sweden from 2010 emphasising all students’ right to be included in and gain support for their learning if needed). Given many government commitments to ensuring that young marginalised people are provided with meaningful education pathways, the question has to be asked, as Lansky does in this issue, ‘Why despite the complementary policy interests do so many young people in the youth justice system remain educationally marginalised?’

Using Bourdieu (1994) and Wacquant (2010), Caroline Lansky explores the ways in which young people located in the youth justice system engage with education. The paper draws on interview data collected from a group of young people under the supervision of one youth offending team in England and Wales. She is particularly concerned with developing an analytical framework for understanding how education and youth justice practices worked together to shape these young people’s educational pathways. Drawing on Hodkinson’s Bourdieuan framework for understanding young people’s career pathways, she uses the term ‘horizons for action’ to consider the pathways that young people can imagine their lives taking. She suggests that ‘the inclusionary and exclusionary practices of education and youth justice agents are likely to play a role in the broadening or narrowing of young people’s ‘horizons for action’’. The conclusions from this study demonstrate the difficulties that many young people with criminal convictions face in accessing mainstream education and maintaining broad education horizons.

Some of the young people in Lansky’s study found themselves in alternative provision after being denied a mainstream education. Such provision has received a number of critiques for its failure to provide students with an education that opens up a range of educational possibilities and to challenge students academically (see for example, Thomson and Russell 2009). Some of the problems with such provision are demonstrated by Dovemark and Beach in their study of a Swedish programme run by an upper secondary school. In their analysis it is apparent that the differentiated system works against the interests of young people from marginalised backgrounds. In this programme young people are steered towards vocational activities, many of which have no definite

outcome, and which limit young people's life choices. They suggest that the way in which the staff do not want to stretch the students or attempt to make them engage with the curriculum and the lack of respect of the academic curriculum by staff works to reinforce their 'precarious' class positioning. They go on to argue that 'freedom of choice' does not always work for the students in these programs. Indeed they claim that the 'softness' of staff within the alternative program actually works against the interests of the young people to the extent that one student in their study suggested a lack of care was evident in the program because it was seen to be 'okay to fuck up your life'. Their work indicates that a differentiated system which removes young marginalized young people from mainstream education without ensuring they can access meaningful and challenging education works against their interests such that they could be considered as disenfranchised (see Mills and McGregor 2014, p. 143; McGregor et al. this issue).

The use of words such as 'disenfranchised' implies that young people who have disengaged from education is a human rights issue and that a focus on maintaining the educational rights of young people might work to address a lack of access to a high quality education as a social justice issue. This, however, is not necessarily the case. Gilleen McCluskey, Sheila Riddell and Elisabet Weedon examine the findings from a study of school exclusion and education other than at school (EOTAS) in Wales. This provides a significant context in which to explore the exclusionary and inclusionary practices of the education system within a rights based framework. Wales has articulated a commitment to children's rights through its policy frameworks. However, school exclusions in that country suggest that such rights are not being met and that the most marginalised young people in that country continue to experience social injustices in relation to exclusions from school. Many of these young people end up with an alternative education provider. As reported by McGregor et al. (this issue), the young people were often highly complimentary about the alternative provider relative to their former mainstream school. However, the quality of provision of EOTAS in Wales was variable. In some cases young people were provided with inappropriate curricula, little pastoral support, physical restraint and punishments based on social isolation. McCluskey et al. suggest that the dissonance between the positive views held by the young people attending EOTAS and some of the concerns raised by others in the study are perhaps an indictment of the lack of children's rights in mainstream schools. Taking a children's rights focus, they conclude by arguing that there is much still to be done in Wales for the policy rhetoric to match the reality for many marginalized young people in that country.

Alternative provision, however, need not lead to a lower quality education. Glenda McGregor, Martin Mills, Debra Hayes and Kitty te Riele draw upon the experiences of young people who have been excluded from school through both formal and informal processes and have found their way in to a second chance school that seeks to provide a meaningful education. These young people from two Australian states are highly positive about their new schooling experiences compared to those in their previous schools. A major criticism of previous schools is that the curriculum lacked relevance and meaning to the students. However, it is possible that in an attempt to make learning relevant that some second chance or flexi schools present students with a watered-down curriculum and limited opportunities (as indicated by Dovemark and Bleach and McCluskey et al. this issue). Thus McGregor et al. explore what 'meaningful learning' in this context might look like for students who have rejected and been rejected by mainstream education. They conclude that whilst it is critical that these schools provide the material and emotional supports to ensure that the young people can attend school, these are insufficient. They also argue that a curriculum that challenges and stretches young people whilst also linking into their worlds is equally as important to the provision of a socially just education.

Whilst many young people excluded from school leave to find other options, it is possible to be excluded and to remain in school. Eva Hjörne and Ann-Carita Evaldsson explore the experiences of one 10 year-old girl, Annika, in a Swedish school who has been labelled as ADHD and as a

consequence has been placed in a special class for such students. Drawing upon diary entries relaying conversations and comments between the student's parents and teachers over the course of a school year, and on two powerful video-recorded incidents in the school life of this girl, they demonstrate that the exclusion perpetrated on this girl, by placing her in this special class, is compounded by the gender injustices to which she was subjected. Labels associated with behaviour, such as ADHD, are far more often attached to boys than they are girls, as a consequence the student, Annika, finds herself in a class of boys. These boys then, often with the collusion of the teachers, employ highly gendered discourses to position her on the margins of this classroom. This ethnographic account of Annika's school experiences demonstrates the ways in which this happens. In particular it documents the progression that takes place in the labelling process as her original construction of being a capable student who can manage school is slowly eroded and finally replaced with the construction of her as a 'disabled ADHD girl'. Hjörne and Evaldsson regard the teachers, parents and other students as being complicit in this construction. They conclude that, 'She is in a sense excluded from an already excluded environment'.

Richard O'Donovan, Naomi Berman and Ani Wierenga take up the issue of preventing exclusion within a school with their commentary on the *Hands on Learning* framework developed in Victoria Australia. As is demonstrated in many of the papers in this issue, respectful relationships need to be at the heart of the education process in order to ensure that marginalised young people feel connected to school. O'Donovan et al. argue that such relationships can be seen as underpinning healthy learning environments for young people. Unfortunately, students who do not form reasonable relationships with peers and staff are unlikely to benefit from being at school and often disengage and become excluded through one means or another (see for example Smyth and Hattam 2004). Within the program outlined by O'Donovan et al., designed for young people who have become disenchanted with school (and often it with them), there has been an emphasis on creating on the site of a mainstream school an '*enabling space*' as an integral part of ensuring the wellbeing of students. These spaces and the relationships operating in them, they argue, work to ensure that young people develop a sense of belonging, self-efficacy and purpose. One of the key effects of this is to ensure that students stay connected to their mainstream school and are not lost to alternative provision and that the inclusion/exclusion binary is disrupted.

We are aware that the term exclusion can be problematic, and as we sought to indicate above, we have not wanted to be limited by various meanings that are regularly invested in the term. To this end we conclude the special issue with a paper by Joanne Dillabough, Julie McLeod and Caroline Oliver that explores representations of exclusion across diverse 'stigmatised' city spaces over time. They argue that narratives of risk and of moral anxiety have played a major role in those processes and practices that have worked to socially exclude many young people. Drawing on interviews with both young and senior people in Vancouver and Melbourne they have analysed exclusion in these city locations across generations. They employ the concept of 'seeing like a border' (Rumford 2013) to understand how young people in different time periods have engaged with these narratives. The powerful accounts of those who have told their stories about growing up in these neighbourhoods and the various forms of exclusion they experienced point to an enduring fear of marginalised young people, albeit inflected by local and temporal discourses. Central to Dillabough et al.'s paper is the need to avoid what they refer to as 'presentism' to fully understand exclusion.

In seeking contributions to the special issue we asked potential contributors to consider what 'exclusion', however read, might mean for young people's future educational and life opportunities. The responses we received were diverse. The papers which make up this special issue provide insights into the lives of young people who are very often forgotten within mainstream education, but go on to form the 'precariat' (Standing, (2011), whose lives are shaped by risk and insecurity. Their experiences and outcomes illustrate widening gaps between groups of young people at the social margins, who experience an 'abundance of risk' (Beck, 1992) and those from socially

advantaged backgrounds who, whilst not invulnerable, are far more tightly insulated from risk. We would also suggest that the papers selected demonstrate many of the complexities associated with the term 'exclusion', with the remedies designed to address its practices and effects, and with its temporal and spatial locatedness.

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- Martin would like to acknowledge the Australian Research Council Future Fellowship (FT110100203) support to visit Edinburgh University and Edinburgh University for hosting the visit.

Sheila would like to thank the Leverhulme Foundation for the award of an International Research Network Grant (IN-089: Special Education and Policy Change in Six Jurisdictions) which supported attendance at the University of Gothenburg seminar.

Eva would like to thank the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences for the grant of research initiation. Without this contribution the symposium in Gothenburg, gathering many distinguished researcher from different countries, would not have happened.